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ABSTRACT

Swedish higher education is discussed with attention to reforms, the structure of higher education, study programs, entrance requirement and admissions, postgraduate studies, economic resources, student unions, and student financial aid. Educational reform created a unified higher education system, combining institutions that had previously been administered separately. Additional reform measures include broadened student recruitment, offering evening courses and distance education, adapting educational offerings to labor market conditions, and decentralizing decisionmaking. In Sweden all institutions of higher education are central government agencies. A new feature of Swedish higher education administration is the six regional boards. Undergraduate education is organized into program committees, while postgraduate education and research are organized into faculties. Student financial aid consists of nonrepayable grants plus larger repayable loans. General and local study programs and grading practices are addressed in the fact sheet, along with general and special admissions requirements for undergraduate and postgraduate studies. Higher education budgeting and duties of teachers are also briefly discussed. (SW)

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FACTS
SHEETS
ON SWEDEN

HIGHER EDUCATION IN SWEDEN

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Fact Sheets on Sweden

Higher Education in Sweden

Reforms in Swedish Higher Education

The Swedish educational system has undergone a continuing series of transformations since the 1950s. A nine-year comprehensive compulsory school and an upper secondary school which integrates theoretical and vocational study programs have gone into operation. Adult education has been expanded. Then in 1975, following extensive studies by government-appointed commissions, the Swedish cabinet presented a bill setting forth guidelines for reforms in higher education. Parliament approved this cabinet proposal and in 1977 passed the additional proposals needed to implement the reforms, including a Higher Education Act. The new higher education system went into effect the same year. In 1975 Sweden had a Social Democratic cabinet, in 1977 a non-socialist one.

The reform created a *unified* higher education system *(högskola)*, combining institutions which had previously been administered separately. New admission rules apply to the entire system, and uniform principles for the administration of higher education are in effect. Students are now better able than before to obtain an overall perspective on the educational programs available. It is also possible to a greater extent than previously to combine courses not included in the same "study program" (specialization or major), for instance combining languages with economics or health care with behavioral sciences.

An important element of the reform in higher education is *broadened recruitment* to studies. From a social-class standpoint, recruitment to higher studies in Sweden is still imbalanced—with working class and also other groups underrepresented—despite reforms in the underlying school system and in financial aid to students. The distribution by sex of students in various programs is also uneven. Revised admission rules are one method with which to achieve a changed, broadened recruitment.

The structure and contents of educational programs must also be changed so that new categories of students will consider it possible as well as consistent with their own aims to enroll for higher studies. A growing number of adult students, for example, are applying for higher education programs, a trend which began even before the higher education reform took effect, and one that was even further stimulated by the reform.

Forms of instruction must be reorganized so that they fit both older and younger students. One concrete example is the growing need for evening classes to serve students who are gainfully employed in addition to studying. Evening programs are often designed to cover course material at a slower pace. Another form of instruction is "distance teaching," which is carried out mainly by correspondence. This form of study allows a person to take most of a course at home, traveling to a town with an institution of higher education only occasionally for seminars and examinations. One of the aims of distance teaching is to make it easier for students who may have regular jobs to take advantage of educational opportunities.

Another significant factor in reaching new categories of students is the *geographical location of educational programs*. Within the new higher education structure, programs are systematically spread among a larger number of places. At present there are central government-operated institutions of higher education at 21 locations. Some of them supervise courses given in towns that lack permanent higher education facilities. In addition, there is the distance teaching mentioned above.

The age distribution of students in undergraduate education, autumn term 1980

Age group	%
Through 24	40
25—34	38
35—44	15
45—54	5
55 and up	2

The Higher Education Act states that a basic principle in planning higher studies is *recurrent education*. This means that opportunities for alternating studies with gainful employment should be expanded.

An important part of the higher education reform concerns the *links between education and other areas of society*. In the new higher education structure, the contents of studies should be adapted to labor market conditions. At the same time, the labor market should be open to influences from higher education. One of the factors determining the intake capacity to various programs is demand from the labor market. People representing public interests and labor market organizations sit on the boards of higher education institutions.

Another important feature of the new higher education structure is *decentralization of decision-making powers* from national to regional and local levels. The new higher education reform can actually be regarded as the beginning of a continuing reform process. It will now be mainly up to local authorities to develop higher education within the framework established by Parliament and the cabinet. Within each individual institution of higher education there are, for instance, greater opportunities than previously for a free allocation of funds provided for various programs.

The new Swedish collective name for higher education, *högskola*, encompasses not only traditional university studies but also those at the various professional colleges and a number of programs previously taught within the upper secondary school system. Most of the programs included in the new, broadened definition of higher education are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs. In addition, there are a number of programs under the purview of the Ministry of Agriculture. Those responsible for the higher education system are the central government, the county councils and some municipalities. Local government-operated higher education consists of the programs once administered as part of the upper secondary school, but which have now been transferred to the higher education system; most of these programs involve health care training. On a national level, higher studies operated by central and local governments are treated in a joint context whenever possible. In the academic year 1980—81 new enrollments were about 42,000. The total number of enrollments was about 170,000 for the same year. Of these, 15,700 students were enrolled for local government-operated higher education and about 12,000 for postgraduate education.

Quantitative trends in Swedish higher education during recent decades

Academic Year	New Enrollments	Total Enrollments
1940—41	2,000	11,000
1950—51	3,800	17,000
1960—61	8,000	37,000
1970—71	28,000	120,000
1973—74	22,000	110,000
1977—78	48,000*	161,000
1979—80	43,000	167,000
1980—81	42,000	170,000

* The increased figures reflect the expanded concept of higher education, according to the reform of 1977.

An important part of the higher education system is *research*. (See FS 24, Research Planning and Organization in Sweden.) The universities and some of the professional colleges play a major part in research, because of the economic and staff resources they possess for undertaking research and because so-called sectorial research (financed by non-university bodies) is often pursued by university-based scholars. Postgraduate training (see below) is also an important part of the higher education system. But it should be mentioned that research facilities do not exist at *all* institutions of higher education in Sweden. The prevailing concentration of research at Sweden's present universities and at certain other institutions of higher education will be maintained. At the same time, all educational programs should have some form of *link with research*, for example lectures by active researchers and more project-oriented work for students, regardless of whether a school has its own permanent research facilities. Parliament has appropriated special funds for this purpose.

The sex distribution of students in undergraduate education, autumn term 1980

Women	55%
Men	45%

The Structure of Study Programs

A major portion of Swedish undergraduate education is organized into about 100 *general study programs* established by Parliament. These specializations or full-degree programs vary in length from 1 to 5½ years. Each general study program consists of *courses* varying in length. Instruction in these general study programs is designed to meet vocational training requirements of a permanent and general nature. Each program may be classified within one of the following five vocational training sectors: 1) technical, 2) administrative, economic and social welfare, 3) medical and nursing, 4) teaching, and 5) cultural and informational.

There are also *local study programs*. Like the general study programs, these may vary in length. The difference is that, among other things, a local study program is normally aimed at local needs and conditions. Funds for local study programs are also disbursed by a different route. Finally, a third type of specialization for undergraduates is the *individual study program*, intended to fulfill the wishes of one or more students for a particular educational program. Both local and individual study programs are established by the governing board of each institution of higher education.

Separate single-subject courses are short-cycle study programs mainly designed to meet the need for further education or advanced professional training. Separate single-subject courses, too, are established by the governing board of each institution of higher education. The above-mentioned principle of recurrent education is reflected in the fact that rather large funds are being allocated for instruction in this form.

The scope of a given study program is measured using a *point* system. One point is equivalent to one week of full-time study. One academic year thus consists of 40 points, and the year is divided into two *terms*.

Marks are generally given on a three-level scale: Fail, Pass and Pass with Distinction. But a number of courses use only a two-level scale. After completion of studies, the student receives a diploma. When these studies have comprised a full study program, the diploma will indicate the name of the degree earned. All such names include the Swedish word *examen* (degree), regardless of the time required to complete the study program; as mentioned above, these programs vary considerably in length. The name of the degree also indicates the field of studies or the occupation involved, e.g. Master of Laws or University Certificate in Operating Room Nursing.

When Parliament decides which general study programs are to exist, it also specifies the length and major aims of each program. In addition, Parliament establishes an economic framework. All this is based on cabinet proposals.

For each general study program there is a curriculum established by the appropriate central government educational agency and applicable at all locations where the program is taught. The curriculum specifies the special admission requirements for the program and its purpose and describes its structure in general terms. A local curriculum, established by a program committee for that study program at each institution where it is taught, stipulates how the program is to be organized, for instance the courses it should include and how many weeks each course should last.

One novelty in the Swedish higher education system is short-cycle technical-vocational (YTH) studies. The aim of these programs is to provide instruction on a post-secondary level in areas that so far have entirely lacked such training. The courses deal primarily with technical fields, for example the steel industry. To be admitted to such a program, a student must have worked a number of years in the appropriate industry. Formal school qualifications are considered less relevant.

Entrance Requirements and Admissions

To be admitted to higher education programs in Sweden, a student must first fulfill the *general admission requirement* which is common to all study programs, and then meet the *special admission requirements* which may be imposed on applicants to a particular study program or course.

The general admission requirement is completion of at least a two-year program at an upper secondary school or other equivalent Swedish education, for example at a folk high school (residential adult school), plus a knowledge of the Swedish and English languages equivalent to at least two years at upper secondary school. A person can also fulfill the general admission requirement by being at least 25 years old, having a record of at least four years of gainful employment, and possessing a knowledge of English equivalent to two years at upper secondary school.

To enter most study programs and courses, a person must also fulfill special admission requirements, i.e. a student must have upper secondary-level knowledge of the particular subjects essential to that study program or course.

If the number of applicants exceeds the number of available places, a selection is made from among qualified applicants, who are first divided into four categories: 1) those with a three-year upper secondary education, 2) those with a two-year upper secondary education, 3) those who have fulfilled the requirements through folk high school studies, and 4) those who have fulfilled the requirements through age and gainful employment. Each category is allotted a number of places proportional to the number of applicants in that category. The selection is based on marks from upper secondary school and, for those who can claim such merits, on working experience. Applicants who have qualified on the basis of age and working experience may take part in an optional scholastic aptitude test. Some students apply for higher education programs directly after their upper secondary studies, while others—for a variety of reasons—do so after a period of gainful employment. There is a rule which guarantees that a certain percentage of students accepted for a program will always be selected from among students who left upper secondary school no longer than three years ago.

Special rules exist for determining which applicants with foreign educational backgrounds fulfill the general admission requirement. A student must have completed at least eleven years of schooling which began no earlier than age six, and also has to meet certain requirements concerning knowledge of Swedish and English. This category of students must also fulfill the appropriate special admission requirements. The student has to have a residence permit before he leaves for Sweden. In addition, he must be admitted to a special course in Swedish. If the number of applicants exceeds the number of available places, a maximum of 10% of these places may be reserved for applicants with foreign educations. In making the selection, the total qualifications of each foreign-educated applicant are assessed individually.

Postgraduate Studies

The Swedish system of postgraduate and research training, introduced in 1969, is based on the principle that a person's studies following the first degree should be systematically planned. A graduate student should take a number of courses and also write a doctoral dissertation. It should normally be possible to complete one's postgraduate studies within four years if studying full-time. Each student is entitled to individual guidance. The dissertation, which is the most important part of a postgraduate program, is defended in public and receives either a Pass or Fail mark. It may be published either as a monograph or as a so-called composite dissertation, consisting of a number of research papers and a summary. If a graduate student passes the necessary courses and the dissertation is accepted, he or she receives the doctorate.

A student must meet both general and special admission requirements to be accepted for postgraduate studies. In other words, the same principle will apply to postgraduate training as to undergraduate training. The general requirement has been set at 80 points, i.e. two years of full-time study. This means that most general study pro-

grams will qualify a student for postgraduate studies. The special requirements include previous knowledge of one or more of the relevant subjects or the need to have other experience. Moreover, the department concerned and its research advisers judge the student's fitness and ability to complete postgraduate studies. These rules are designed to guarantee that the quality of postgraduate education is maintained.

In some fields today, there are training programs that assume previous undergraduate education but are not research training. Examples of such advanced training courses are specialist training for nurses and training for remedial teachers.

Economic Resources, Intake Capacity and Location of Programs

The factors which determine how many students can be offered places in the new higher education system are society's needs for a trained labor force and the individual desires and needs of students. The ultimately decisive factor is what resources the public sector considers possible to allot for higher education, in competition with other public programs.

A fundamental principle in appropriating funds is that each of the various institutions of higher education should, to the greatest possible extent, decide how to use these funds to fulfill the goals that have been established. As mentioned previously, an effort has thus been made to achieve greater local economic decision-making rights than was once the case. Another basic principle is that appropriations for undergraduate education are kept separate from funds for research and postgraduate education. This planning principle does not prevent undergraduate, postgraduate and research programs from being linked together in their day-to-day operations.

The following section describes conditions prevailing within the portion of the higher education system run by central government authorities. Higher education institutions operated by county councils and municipalities receive central government subsidies. Each county council or municipal government is responsible for the remaining costs. It should be added that county councils and municipalities are entitled to levy local taxes.

Institutions of higher education are central government agencies, which submit annual budget proposals for their operating funds. These documents are assessed on the central government level by the National Board of Universities and Colleges, which prepares a budget request covering all institutions in its purview. In January each year the cabinet presents its overall central government budget bill to Parliament, which then decides what money will be appropriated for the fiscal year beginning that July. Funds for education and research are placed at the direct disposal of the institutions of higher education. When it comes to local and individual study programs as well as separate single-subject courses, regional boards divide up funds among the institutions in their respective region. Only in exceptional cases does the cabinet specify in detail how the money should be used.

Parliament decides each year on how many places there are to be in higher education. There are two different ways of indicating how many students will be accepted at the institutions. A number of study programs have restricted admissions *(numerus clausus)*. These include studies at medical schools and engineering colleges, for which Parliament decides the number of admissions on the basis of cabinet recommendations. The universities and professional colleges may make small adjustments in the number of students they admit. The number in other study programs is set as follows: Parliament, on the basis of a cabinet recommendation, appropriates funds for a group of study programs at a given institution, indicating a planned number of admissions for each program. In these cases the institution itself decides what maximum figures to impose for admission to each study program. Examples of such programs are economics, law and religion.

As mentioned above, there are permanent facilities for central government-operated higher education programs at 21 locations in Sweden. In seven of these towns (Stockholm, Uppsala, Linköping, Lund, Göteborg, Umeå, and Luleå), higher education institutions also have permanent resources for research and postgraduate education.

The budget for the higher education system totaled SEK 4,600 million for the fiscal year 1981/82. Of these, 2,400 million went to undergraduate education, 1,300 million to research and postgraduate education, 700 million to premises and 200 million to other purposes.

Universities and colleges in Sweden

Teachers

The reorganization of Swedish higher education has created certain contradictions in the rules regarding the formal qualifications and the official duties of teachers in the new system. Within that part of higher education made up by the universities, teaching positions are characterized by a link between undergraduate instruction and research work. To qualify for a very large proportion of these teaching positions, a person must have a doctorate. This group of teachers may be divided into two main categories: one whose duties include both research and teaching and another category (the university lecturers) who, in principle, do teaching only. The first category consists of three levels of qualification: research assistant, docent (reader or assistant professor) and full professor. In addition, this part of the higher education system has a large number of teaching assistant and administrative assistant posts held by graduate students.

In the remaining part of the central government-operated higher education system, positions intended to combine research and teaching are very rare. The job structure here is dominated more by teaching duties. But there are a significant number of posts —lectureships—for which a doctorate is required.

In 1977 the cabinet appointed a commission of inquiry whose task was to recommend a simpler, more rational job structure for the entire higher education system. The commission has published its report and a large number of interest organizations have now been given the opportunity to submit their views on the commission's recommendations.

The Organizational Structure of Swedish Higher Education

In Sweden all institutions of higher education are central government agencies. They do not constitute corporate bodies with their own spheres of jurisdiction, but instead pursue their activities on the same basis as other public agencies. Their employees are national civil servants, and their students pay no tuition fees.

The National Board of Universities and Colleges *(Universitets- och högskoleämbetet, UHÄ)* is the central government agency which supervises the higher education system, and it is directly responsible to the cabinet. UHÄ is headed by a board of governors, with the Chancellor of the Swedish Universities and Colleges as chairman and with twelve other members, most of them representing public interests. In addition, there are two employee representatives. The main task of UHÄ is to plan and coordinate the various activities of the country's higher education system. One important annual task is to submit to the cabinet a budget request for the funds needed to cover the teaching and research activities of Swedish higher education.

Higher education programs under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Agriculture are organized in a somewhat different fashion. The Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences carries out teaching, research and development work. This university's board of governors functions both as an executive body for the institution and as a government agency directly under the cabinet. The University of Agricultural Sciences consists of three faculties. For undergraduate education there are a number of program committees.

A new feature of Swedish higher education administration is the six *regional boards*. The country is divided into six higher education regions, each with a number of institutions of higher education. The regional boards have planning and coordinating tasks regarding undergraduate education. The regional boards are also responsible for helping forge ties between undergraduate education and research work. The majority of the members of each regional board represent public interests—most of them are people active in political life on different levels or representing labor market organizations—while the remainder represent those active in higher education. All regional board members are appointed by the cabinet.

At present there are 33 institutions of higher education in Sweden, with the highest body in each being the governing board (senate or council). This board consists of 1) the rector of the institution (vice chancellor or college president) and in some cases also an administrative director, 2) representatives of public interests, 3) teachers, 4) representatives of employees, and 5) student representatives. Those members representing public interests are appointed by the county council and the municipal government(s) where the institution is located and are thus political party representatives. The governing board has overall responsibility for all operations within the institution, e.g. economic administration and planning, personnel matters and the like. As mentioned previously, the higher education reform involved a decentralization of decision-making rights on many issues, not least to the governing boards of the individual institutions. The chief representative of each institution is a rector, appointed by the cabinet on the basis of recommendations by the institution's governing board or by an elective assembly which includes teachers, other staff and student representatives. At larger institutions of higher education, where both teaching and research are pursued, there is also an administrative director, appointed by the cabinet.

The smallest working unit within the higher education system is the *department*. It either provides undergraduate education alone or else combines undergraduate and postgraduate education with research. A department is headed by a board including representatives of all categories of people active in the department. The head of the departmental board is called the chairman (*prefekt*). In some cases, a department may be run by a chairman and have no board. The governing board of each institution of higher education decides what departments will exist.

For undergraduate education, there are *program committees*, important bodies under the new system. Such a committee exists, first of all, for each of the general study programs taught at a given location, or for a group of general study programs. The program committee decides how a program of instruction is to be organized and implemented. The committee consists of one third teachers, one third students and one third outside representatives of the appropriate occupational categories (e.g. in the case of law studies, an attorney or judge). There may also be representatives of technical and administrative staff at the institution.

Postgraduate education and research are organized into *faculties*. There are two bodies within each faculty: a *faculty assembly* and a *faculty board*. The faculty assembly, which is essentially a consultative body, consists of all holders of professorships in the subject areas covered by that faculty in the entire higher education region and of holders of posts as teachers with a doctorate in the same region; in other words, the assembly is formally tied to a single institution of higher education but is common to a region. The faculty board, on the other hand, makes decisions on matters concerning requests for and distribution of funds, planning of postgraduate education, etc. The board consists of roughly ten members: representatives of the researchers/teachers, the employees and the students, with the first of these categories in the majority. On the board may also sit a representative of public interests and of research and development work outside the higher education system.

Financial Aid to Students, Student Unions

As to *financial aid*, a fundamental principle in Swedish higher education is that all students who need help to finance their studies should receive assistance from the central government for this purpose. This aid takes the form of study grants and loans, collectively described as "study funds." To receive such funds, a student must fulfill certain requirements. For example, the grants and loans are means-tested and may be reduced depending on the student's own income and assets. But in deciding the amount of study funds to be paid, no account is taken of the economic situation of the student's parents. A person aged 45 or over cannot, as a rule, receive study funds. In general a person may receive study funds for a maximum of 12 terms (six years); exceptions can be made, for instance in the case of graduate students. To continue receiving study funds, a person must show acceptable scholastic achievement. Foreign students not permanently domiciled in Sweden are not eligible to receive study funds.

Study funds consist of a non-repayable grant plus a larger repayable loan. In addition, a student with children aged under 16 may receive a child supplement, which is repayable. The loan portion of the study funds is interest-free, but the principal grows with rising consumer prices or in accordance with the cabinet's decision. The non-repayable grant is a fixed amount that can only be increased through a parliamentary decision. The grant portion currently totals SEK 2,200 for a nine-month academic year. During the academic year 1982—83 the repayable loan portion is SEK 23,100.

Repayment of study loans is governed by rules designed to provide social welfare guarantees. A person whose income or assets are below a certain level may be allowed to postpone loan repayments and a person whose work capacity has been reduced over a long period due to illness or handicap can have the debt written off entirely. Otherwise there is a two-year grace period after a person stops receiving study funds and before repayment of the loan begins. The repayment period is comparatively long—as a rule at least twenty years for people who complete their higher education while still young.

For graduate students there are also a fixed number of special fellowships, which run for a maximum of four years. These fellowships are outright grants but are counted as taxable income. A person is allowed to perform a limited amount of gainful employment while receiving a graduate fellowship. Another form of financial aid for graduate students is to hold a post as a teaching or administrative assistant, which means that a person is required to teach or perform other work on a part-time basis while using the remaining time for studies. A third, comparatively common way to finance postgraduate studies is to combine one's studies with a job on a research project funded by one of the national research councils or some other outside body. About one tenth of Sweden's graduate students have fellowships while about one fourth work as teaching or administrative assistants. The system of financing postgraduate studies will change as a result of decisions that Parliament took in 1982. A new type of post will be instituted intended solely for graduate students. The posts of teaching and administrative assistants will be phased out and replaced by fellowships and graduate-student posts.

Students in technical-vocational (YTH) programs receive a particularly advantageous form of financing known as adult study assistance. The purpose of this aid is to compensate for loss of income on the part of a person who has taken a leave of absence from a job in order to study. Adult study assistance consists mainly of a taxable outright grant, plus a smaller repayable study loan.

Students at Swedish universities and professional colleges are required to become members of a *student union*. At each institution of higher education there are one or more such organizations. They function as "trade unions" on behalf of students and, among other things, nominate student representatives to the various governing bodies in the higher education system. They are also responsible for a considerable share of so-called indirect student welfare services. To finance its activities, each union is entitled to levy membership fees.

Most of the local student unions are members of the National Association of Student Unions, which thus indirectly encompasses about 150,000 students.

Health and medical care services for students in central government-operated higher education are currently administered by the students' own organizations. In places where there is a special student health center, there are doctors and other paid staff. Student organizations also operate physical fitness programs. Both these services are financed by the central government and by the students themselves. A government-appointed commission of inquiry has proposed that the institutions of higher education be responsible for health care, including the physical fitness programs, with great influence vested in the students who would still be expected to contribute financially. Health care for students in local government-operated higher education is organized as school health service.

Over the past thirty years, the student organizations have built and administered a large number of student residence halls with the help of central government loans on favorable terms. The proportion of students living in these buildings varies from 10 to 40% in different university and college towns. According to a parliamentary decision in 1971, no new residence halls especially for students are to be built in Sweden, but instead students will be integrated into other types of housing. The existing student residence halls ought eventually to be transferred to municipal non-profit housing corporations.

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